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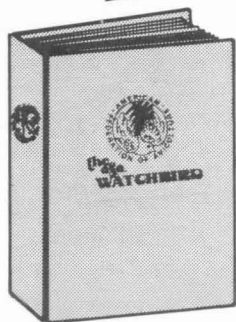
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Photo by Nancy A. Reed

Hand feeding a young cockatiel chick using an eye dropper.

Hand Feeding

by Dee Dee Squyres

Cockatiels are one of the easiest birds to tame and train. They need not be hand fed to make a loving and devoted pet. A completely independent 8 week old youngster can be tamed in a matter of hours. With those thoughts in mind, I suggest you hand feed out of necessity only.

A newly hatched chick can go 9 to 12 hours before its first meal, any longer and it will dehydrate and die. It is vital that you check the nest box often to confirm that the parents are feeding the chick. The first few days are the most critical. If a chick is not fed you must act fast. If you see that a chick is empty and dehydrating give it a few drops of water, heated to 100 degrees, with an eye dropper. The water will keep the chick alive until you can prepare a mixture of hi-protein baby cereal and water. Mix equal parts and feed at 100 degrees. It may only be necessary to supplement feed a few times until the parents pick it up.

In the event that the parents reject the chick and do not feed it at all, it would be necessary to resume feeding the chick or chicks. Place them in a brooder at 100 degrees, humidity 40 to 50%. Continue with the water and baby cereal and add 1 drop of milk per teaspoon of mixture for the first 5 days. There is no rule as to how much or how often the chick will eat. Check every few hours and feed as needed, but don't overfeed, keep some food in their crop. We feed no bird from midnight to 6 o'clock in the morning.

After each feeding, gently clean the mandible with moist tissue. Stale, caked food or too much pressure will cause a beak deformity.

The digestive system of a baby bird is very delicate. Thick or cold foods or feeding too rich foods will cause an impacted crop. The temperature at which the chicks are kept can also affect their digestion.

We use one basic formula for hand feeding all of our birds, budgies to macaws, with slight variations. It is mixed as follows in quantity, stored in plastic containers and frozen until needed.

Two thirds cup hi-protein baby cereal, one third cup monkey chow, one half cup wheat hearts, one cup ground sunflower meal, one half cup hulled millet, one fourth cup ground peanuts, (the following are jars of baby food) seven and three fourths ounce oatmeal, apple sauce and banana, four and one half ounce strained corn, and three and one third ounce egg yolk. Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl. Add water so you can mix. Now take two cups at a time and run it through a blender at high speed. Add water as necessary to make a very liquid mixture. As the mixture sets it will thicken so more water may be needed before feeding. This mixture will keep about three days refrigerated or may be frozen and used as needed.

The above formula is diluted with equal parts baby cereal and blended. Add enough water to formulate a soupy consistency. Add 1 teaspoon of milk to 5 ounces of formula and feed at 100 degrees. Again feed often but don't over feed.

Baby cockatiels are easy to feed for the first 2 to 3 weeks. Some time after this

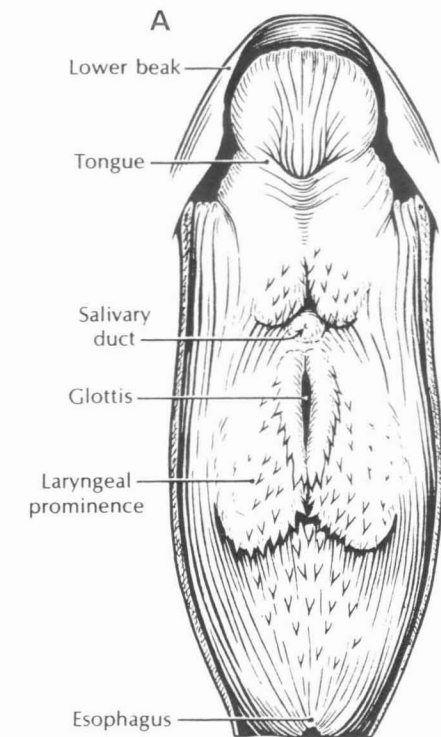
period they lose some of their gusto and are quite difficult to feed with a spoon or eye dropper. At this point I throw away the eye dropper or spoon and start syringe feeding.

Don't let the thought of putting a syringe down a baby's neck frighten you. With a little understanding and practice you will find it the only way to go.

The diameter of a cockatiel glottis is approximately 2.5 mm. The distance down the esophagus to the crop is 2 to 3½ inches. (Ref. diagrams A & B.) It is important to use a feeding tube large enough not to allow entry of the glottis. The tube should also be soft and flexible so as not to puncture the esophagus or crop. For this I use ¼ inch diameter surgical tubing (aquarium airline tubing is not pliable enough). The feeding tube should be 2 to 2½ inches long. The size syringe you use may vary, however it should be of the capacity to complete at least one feeding without refilling.

O.K., mom...you are now ready to feed... Insert the feeding tube into the 100 degree formula and pull the desired amount into the syringe. Allow no air bubble to get into the syringe. Dip the feeding tube into hot water, this allows the tube to press down the esophagus more easily.

Place the chick on a solid surface where it has good footing. Holding the bird with your left hand, insert the tube into the corner of the mouth, depress a small amount of food. At this point the chick will swallow and allow you to gently pass the tube over the tongue and down the esophagus. As you pass the tubing into the esophagus, gently lift the head. This will straighten the neck and eliminate the curves of the esophagus. Gently depress the food. Watch the crop, don't over feed.



If at any time the feeding tube doesn't pass down the neck with ease, remove it and start over... DON'T FORCE.

When the chicks are 3 weeks old drop the temperature of the brooder to 85 to 90 degrees and feed the formula at full strength 3 times a day. We feed at 7 a.m., 12 p.m., and 10 p.m. At 5 weeks put the chicks in a wire cage with water bottle, grit and seed on the floor. Eliminate the noon feeding. At 6 weeks drop the 7 a.m. feeding. When you are sure the chicks are eating on their own discontinue the 10 p.m. feeding.

After the youngsters have been eating on their own for 2 weeks put them in a baby flight. We have used this formula with great success. There are many formulas for baby birds; we offer you ours.

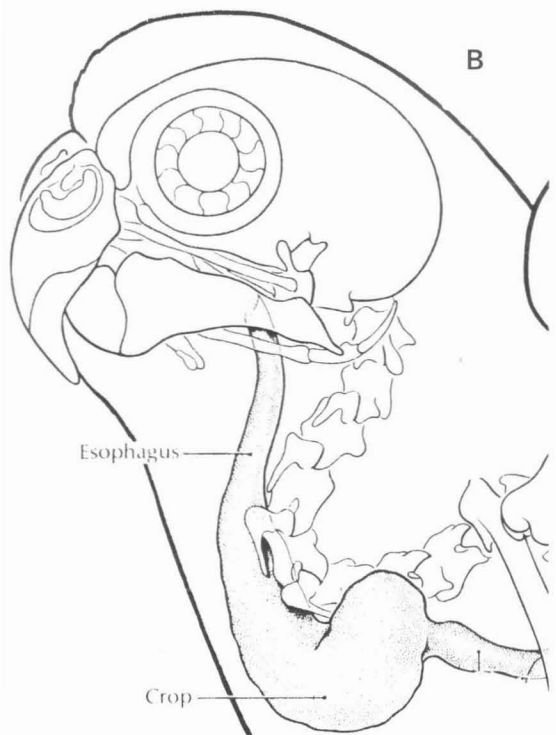
Hand feeding a young cockatiel chick using a syringe.

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Photo by Dee Dee Squyres



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